

TECHNICAL NOTES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

WYOMING

SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

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Subject: PINON JAY*

General

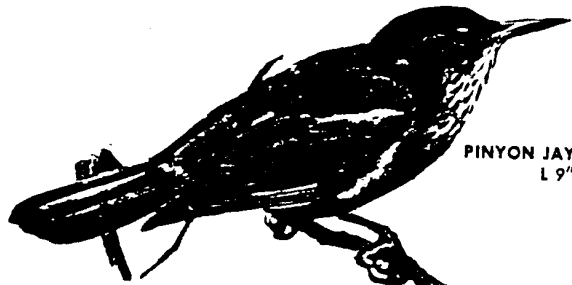
The pinon jay (Gymnorhinus cyanocephalus) is a common resident of pinyon-juniper woodlands and ponderosa pine-juniper associations in the western United States.

Food Requirements

Pinon jays are omnivorous. A large part of their diet consists of pinyon nuts, as well as yellow and black pine nuts, cedar berries, juniper berries, tender pine cones, small seeds, grain from stubble fields, and insects, especially grasshoppers. Occasionally, the eggs and young of birds are also consumed. If there is a scarcity of pinyon nuts in the region, these jays have been known to damage crops of beans, corn, and grains. Pinon jays feed from tree to tree or along the ground and are able to catch insects on the wing.

Water Requirements

Bailey wrote: "Throughout the fall, the pinon jay has been reported in large flocks from various localities, its presence depending on the pinyon crop and water." One study reported, "It was common to see pinon jays eating snow, and at times this was their sole source of free water."



Prepared by: Richard Rintamaki, State Biologist


State Resource Conservationist

*Information taken from Ecoregion M3113 Handbook and Habitat Suitability Index Models, Wildlife Species Narratives (literature searches), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, various dates between 1978-1984.

Cover Requirements

The food and cover requirements of the pinon jay can be satisfied in young to mature pinyon and juniper woods. Pinon jays are found at Elevations of 5,000 to 9,000 ft (1,524 to 2,743 m), sometimes ascending to 13,000 ft (3,692 m) in the autumn. In winter, they may seek deep ravines to sun themselves on a bank or on low cedar branches.

Reproductive Requirements

These jays nest in scrub oaks, pinyon pines, and junipers. In New Mexico, south-facing slopes were often chosen, usually at about 7,500 ft (2,286 m) elevation. One study found pinon jay nests in Colorado that were placed about 5 to 12 ft (1.5 to 3.7 m) above the ground, usually in a high open situation and not especially concealed.

Special Habitat Requirements

No special habitat requirements for the pinon jay were found in the literature.

Interspersion Requirements

In Arizona, a flock of about 250 pinon jays maintained a well defined home range of about 8 mi² (20.7 km²). Flocks were observed traveling 1 to 2 mi (1.6 to 3.2 km) for new feeding or watering areas.

Special Considerations

Pinon jays are not migratory, but exhibit mass movements to and from feeding grounds. These movements are governed by food supply rather than by climate.

Human influence can be beneficial to these jays since they do consume grains and beans from farms. However, pinyon-juniper control would reduce the nesting and feeding habitat of the pinon jay.